

# 'Secrets of Attila' fails to enlighten

If you like off-beat treatments of popular management thinking, the newly released book, "Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun," may appeal to you.

In this book you'll learn of the imagined management style of the barbarian commander who oversaw 700,000 troops and conquered large portions of fifth century Asia and Europe.

Thanks to a Gallic monk familiar with his ruthless ways, Attila was nicknamed "The Scourge of God."

Not one to let a public relations opportunity wilt, Attila supposedly instructed his fiercest-looking warriors to "wear garb of rough fur and leather, to eat only raw meat and to inflict the most horrible tortures on their prisoners." That kind of behavior may perpetuate a legend, but it's certainly not the stuff of running a company.

Using the storytelling tradition and considerable historic license,



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Here are some of the notions, and modern-day contradictions, put forward by the fictionalized Attila:

■ "A nation of one ancestry and race is weak." The obvious contradiction to this glib, simplistic statement is Japan. Also, Attila probably thought and acted more globally than most any leader in history. So it's surprising that the fictionalized Attila also endorsed

"Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun" advocates a management style based on the perfidious Hun's antics. Stripped of fanciful narrative, however, I found it merely a collection of maxims from

the provincial idea of nationalism: "Peace in the camps would only result from a new spirit of nationalism."

■ "Known for their respect for women..." Here the fictional license gets out of hand: "Respect for women?" This book is unabashedly about sexist, domineering males. The notion of a female Attila isn't even broached.

■ "One of the great morale boosters within Hun ranks was the promise of unlimited ransacking of conquered foes." If you view competition as an enemy that deserves to be despoiled, you might find solace in promising your troops ill-gotten booty.

No doubt the author intended that his historical improvisation should be taken in jest — a light-hearted platform for grinding out the proverbs of good management. While the Attila analogy is a clever, even shocking, gimmick, I found the story too contrived to

sustain interest for a hundred pages. The same axioms are repeated too many times.

■ **The Bottom Line:** There are some executives who may subscribe to the "Lord of the Universe" school of large ego management. To these, the added mantle of "Scourge of God" may be a welcome rubric. But I expect most enlightened executives will find this literary device for teaching management principles to be simplistic and offensive.

"Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun," by Wess Roberts, is available in most bookstores. It's published by Warner Books Inc., 666 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10103 and costs \$16.95.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.